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if you are going to train your students to see and to think, it is largely inevitable. Their minds, when they come to us, have reached the critical, but—ordinarily—not the constructive stage; and we have to take these minds as we find them, and make the best of them. The constructive work will have to be done largely by the teacher. Even here, however, if he is determined to do nothing for his pupils which they can be allured, or cajoled, or whipped into doing for themselves, he will find that there are more ways of throwing the burden upon them than he would ever have suspected if he had not made the attempt.

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### THE AIM AND CONTENT OF THE FIRST COLLEGE COURSE IN ETHICS<sup>1</sup>

I WANT to consider the aim and content of the first college course in ethics as a moral issue larger than our customary academic vision cares about. Permeating all that I shall say is the fundamental guess that, in general, there are some ideals even more imperative than those of scholarship, namely, those for the sake of which scholarship exists at all; that, from a pedagogical point of view, philosophy has larger responsibilities than those she owes to herself; that we should cease finding philosophy and teaching philosophy merely in terms of the technical problems and systems; that we should regard our students as something more than potential philosophers, and that, in the case of the student in the first course in ethics, this something more should be thoroughly defined.

#### I. AIM

What the course in ethics shall be about depends upon the answer to the prior question: What is the best purpose subserved by having such a course at all, in view of the present state of the college curriculum?

I am convinced that this question, in turn, is peculiarly dependent upon what is to be our ultimate ideal in education. Many other current problems converge to the same point, which is the reason that the solution of this question concerning the educational ideal is so singularly insistent of late.

Now, American ideals of education are many and conflicting, but the ideal most widely emphasized from the beginning of our educa-

<sup>1</sup> Read before the Western Philosophical Association, University of Chicago, April 6, 1912.

tional history is what can be most succinctly expressed as education for democracy. Sometimes this ideal receives such narrower phrasings as "education for self-government" or "education for citizenship." The recognition of this ideal has always been at the basis of the assumption by our government of its educational responsibility, a recognition which, more than anything else, has made our educational system what it is. In spite of new and illuminating theories of the end of education, and partly because of them, this ideal has steadily grown and is receiving emphasis from some of the most prominent professional educators of our generation. True, this ideal is not insistently present in college faculties; there, the proximate end of teaching, scholarship for its own sake, receives its expected emphasis. But this immediate ideal can never finally settle the fundamental meaning of a particular discipline in a college curriculum, much less the ultimate end of that curriculum itself. The ideal which can settle such matters is the ideal with which I am now seriously concerned.

Education for democracy is not best defined as education for self-government, although it includes that; for, of course, democracy is not merely, or even primarily a form of government, but a form of society. It involves a special theory of persons, their nature, their worth, their possibilities, and their social rights and duties. Just what democracy is need not be settled here: but whatever else it is, it is primarily an ethical conception, and an ethical conception of a very distinct type. Thus, first of all, the founding and the maintaining of a concrete democratic society is not merely a political project; it is primarily an ethical undertaking for the sake of a definite ethical ideal of human welfare. Secondly, it is distinctive of the very conception of democracy that it is an undertaking which implies rational, self-conscious responsibility on the part of every real member of it. Thirdly, this in turn implies, first of all and all the time, the self-conscious examination and evaluation of moral standards by every man and woman who has achieved democracy's rights and duties. And, now, here is the crucial point: education for democracy, in contrast to education for less autonomous forms of society, means a new and cardinal emphasis upon a thorough training in all the technique of efficient moral reflection. It is not that democracy will be the worse if this is not recognized: it simply will not be at all.

Now, how is the American college student to arrive at a reflective knowledge of ethical values such as is to make his education fundamentally efficient? Well, he will receive it indirectly and partially from many of his courses, especially in literature and in such social sciences as history, economics, and sociology. But there is only one

course in which he can receive a direct and intensive training of this sort, only one course which can give him in a systematic way the data indispensable to his full moral consciousness and which will educate him to recognize and apply the various sorts of moral standards of value. That one course is the course in ethics. And he should be able to find this training in an elementary course, since, for one reason, it may be the only course in philosophy that he cares to take; and, for reasons yet to be given, he should take it early in his curriculum.

What I mean by the larger educational responsibilities of ethics as a science is now evident. It is a responsibility dictated by the larger responsibilities of education in a democracy. The first course in ethics must be modified to some degree in terms of this responsibility. Nor are these general considerations the only commanding ones. For moral scholarship has assumed the place of an educational issue because of acute social issues definitely depending upon it. Even philosophers with only theoretical interests, if their theory reaches down to an analysis of contemporary institutions, can not fail to observe that the conspicuous American social institutions, especially those of politics, society in the restricted and broad senses, education itself, the national literature, and the institution of religion, are lacking nothing so much as ethical self-consciousness to make possible their rational progress. Plainly, this lack of accurate power in ethical reflection is the chief reason of what Professor Royce calls the "inefficiency of our ideally disposed public." We are a nation of idealists, but of an idealism without sufficiently definite ideals, often strenuously aimless and busily incoordinate.

Will a college course in ethics remedy the trouble? No, the question is not quite so absurd as that. The question is: Since, admittedly, education alone can make democracy possible, since indeed, education *exists* to make it possible, what part does a training in ethics assume? Without losing its technical character, and, above all, never leaving scholarship for the dubious and sickening ideal of edification, this course, somewhat revised in content and method, is yet to bear a heavier and more definite burden in the process of education for democracy. All the other aims of a course in ethics may be attained in consonance with this aim and indeed through it.

## II. CONTENT

In view of the aim just emphasized, the content of the first course in ethics should be, primarily, a review of the various criteria of the moral judgment, with emphasis upon the conceptions of personality and of society involved in these. This content should be pursued in the spirit of a constructive search. Let us insist that it shall be

constructive: doubt may be the birth of philosophy to the philosopher, but it often means permanent scepticism to the sophomore. To prevent the student from getting moral scepticism as the only result of his ethics course, it should have a minimum of unsettled and unsettling problems. Certainly they belong to a later course. Many of our first courses in ethics are failures because we seem unwittingly to adopt the noble aim of launching students into a life of ethical theorizing for the sake of ethics: this might well be the working ideal if men were not what they are: but this one course in ethics will be the only definite and coherent training in ethical theory that the average student will ever receive.

As to the nature of the constructive result, it should at least include the ethics of that form of society in which the student is to find his moral education worth while—the ethics of democracy. I myself make one of my elementary ethics courses a study of American ideals: and some such study might well be an integral part of every elementary course in ethics. The procedure is, first, to review democracy's doctrine of the person; secondly, to define the ideal of democratic society in terms of this doctrine; thirdly, to examine five conspicuous American institutions, namely, politics, society, education, literature, and religion, ascertaining concerning each: (*a*) The ideal pretended and announced; (*b*) the ideal implied in organization and deeds, or the ideal actually being realized; (*c*) the true ideal; (*d*) how to make the real ideal efficient. A syllabus in connection with the study of each institution, including a carefully selected bibliography, is a great help in this part of the course. With such a content as here outlined, a valuable prerequisite is elementary psychology: indeed, it seems to me that this is the one prerequisite to any ethics course.

With regard to the classic difficulty in finding a suitable textbook, I am convinced, after trying six different texts and readopting one that was discarded in disgust, that the trouble is not chiefly with texts, but with our own vagueness of purpose in using them. Any text is insufficient in itself: but several of the standard texts can be made fruitful in our hands if our purpose is vital enough to use them and supplement them rationally.

It is evident that I believe that the first course in ethics should have a much more important place in the college curriculum than is now accorded it. This would be amply justified in terms of the aim I have held for it: but when one adds the strangely neglected consideration that an ethical self-consciousness is imperative for the student's rational evaluation of the educational process itself, especially in terms of an elective system which presupposes autonomous standards, the conclusion is beyond cavil. For education is only

falsely defined as the satisfaction of the student's wants: education goes deeper than that: *education is training men and women to have the right wants and to know how to set about to fulfil them.* The first part of this educational task is a strictly ethical problem.

It would be different if our colleges would provide any other courses that would do the work: but none of them do: and I am not sure that an ethics course will ever be superseded in this service.

The course is so important that it is not inconceivable that it should be required of all students at least as early as the sophomore year. At least this early, because the ethics course is best adapted of all the philosophical courses to build on the knowledge of the student, for even freshmen have had self-conscious moral experiences. We have many fallacious qualms about requiring courses in philosophy, especially in ethics. This is one course, we say, which the student can not afford to hate because he has to take it and after which he will say "Thank God, I'm through with that!" Such an attitude, we say, defeats the very end of philosophic teaching. So it does: but what is the matter with our teaching if all that it achieves is to make a student dislike a vital subject? A teacher who can not render the first course in ethics interesting enough to make every student glad clean through that he took the subject, simply ought not to be teaching elementary ethics at all.

Not only in the teaching of ethics, but in the teaching of other elementary philosophy courses, a new spirit is discernible. It was well shown, in the answer to the questionnaire<sup>2</sup> recently sent out by a committee of the Western Philosophical Association that in courses in the introduction to philosophy there is new insistence upon the student's independent thinking in terms of present-day problems. And we need not be concerned with regard to whether philosophy in general or ethics in particular will suffer in discharging its larger responsibilities. To quote a passage from the very suggestive preface to "Ethics" by Dewey and Tufts: "A science which takes part in the actual work of promoting moral order and moral progress must receive a valuable reflex influence of stimulus and test."

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<sup>2</sup> "The Aims and Methods of Introduction Courses: A Questionnaire," J. W. Hudson, this JOURNAL, Vol. IX., pages 29-39.